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SUBJECT: BURUNDI'S RULING PARTY ELECTS NEW PARTY HEAD

¶1. (U) At a party congress in Ngozi on February 7, Burundi's ruling party, the CNDD-FDD, elected a new party president, Jeremie Ngendakumana, the current ambassador to Kenya. The party also elected two Vice Presidents, members of parliament Jean Marie Sesema from Bubanza and Denise Sindokotse from Bujumbura Rurale. Sindokotse is a Tutsi and a former Ministry of Communications Chief of Staff. This marks the first time the party has elected vice presidents. The party also elected two Executive Secretaries, Lazare Mvuyekure and Canesius Ndayavune.

¶2. (U) The CNDD-FDD's Secretary General opened the conference with comments reaffirming the party's commitment to the principles of democracy and human rights. He asked for the support of Burundi's partners, saying that the party is committed to an open and transparent dialogue. Several ambassadors accredited to Burundi, including Ambassador Moller, attended the opening ceremonies.

¶3. (U) The Ngozi congress follows weeks of growing divisions and increasingly acrimonious debate concerning the party's leadership. The party's former president, Hussein Radjabu, declined to attend the session. Radjabu subsequently announced that he did not recognize the party's decisions because they did not follow the constitution or party laws. He claimed that many party members were still behind him. Other notable absentees included the Second Vice President, Marina Barampama, a key Radjabu supporter. Barampama reportedly sought to dissuade some CNDD-FDD members from attending by convoking a meeting of officials from socio-economic ministries in Bujumbura on the same day. Nevertheless, the congress enjoyed a high turnout from all regions except Muyinga, Radjabu's traditional power base.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: It is too early to speculate on the meaning of these appointments and on their possible impact on party politics. Ambassador Ngendakumana is considered to have strong ties to President Nkurunziza; his appointment may suggest a move to strengthen the President's role in the party. Some observers have suggested that the government gave him his current post in Kenya in an effort to defuse tensions between Ambassador Ngendakumana and Radjabu.

MOLLER